

Michigan United Conservation Clubs

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Senate Committee on Agriculture

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture

Wednesday, October 21, 2009

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Mr. Chair and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak on Senate Concurrent Resolution 24. My name is Dave Nyberg and I am here today on behalf of the 45,000 sportsmen and women of Michigan United Conservation Clubs who, first of all, would like to thank you for your leadership and initiative to combine the Departments of Natural Resources and Environmental Quality. Effective, transparent, science-based natural resource management is paramount to the collective conservation and recreational opportunities our organizations support for the benefit of future generations. My written comments today also represent the view of various members of the Conservation Coalition, a coalition of statewide hunting, fishing, trapping, and conservation organizations.

MUCC and members of the Conservation Coalition view the combination of the DNR and DEQ as an excellent opportunity to improve the management practices the departments currently employ, but also to re-energize a new, service-based department that works with the bi-partisan Natural Resources Commission to establish science-based management policies. However, we are here to support SCR 24 in order to preserve access, transparency, and science-based management in our new Department. Specifically, we are deeply disappointed and concerned about the provision in subsection (II)(2) of Executive Order 45 of 2009, which removes the authority of the Natural Resources Commission to appoint the Department Director, and instead, allocates this appointment authority to the Governor. This is a significant shift away from the collective goals of hunters, anglers, and conservationists to remove politics from natural resource management. This power shift also severely undermines the fundamental principles Michigan citizens overwhelmingly supported under Proposal G of 1996.

E.O. 45 of 2009 will transfer the NRC's appointment authority to a politically-accountable executive, which will (1) Reduce Transparency in the Department, (2) Promote a top-level administration that limits public input, and (3) Place politics above science-based resource management and the goals of Proposal G.

We believe that Executive Order 45 of 2009:

- **Reduces Transparency.** Shifting the appointment of the Director from the bi-partisan, citizen-represented NRC reduces the transparency, openness and accessibility of the Department. Under E.O. 45, the hiring of the Department Director will now occur within the Executive Department and Department policies and procedures will no longer need to move through the NRC. Additionally, the budget of the Department may also become less transparent as the accountability is left exclusively to the Governor instead of a citizen-based commission. Some even argue that we must go one step further to increase transparency by creating an oversight committee on the DNR's finances.
 - *Combining the DNR and DEQ should be an opportunity to create a more transparent, open, and accessible Department, not the other way around.*

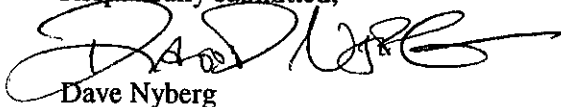
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- **Promotes a top-level administration that limits public input.** The new structure of the DNRE under E.O. 45 would be similar to the structure of the current DEQ, a structure that limits public input on the Department's policies and procedures. While select organizations and lobbyists might have an opportunity to access the administration to provide input on department policies and procedures, the general public is left out. This structure limits regular public access to key decision-makers and may weaken the responsiveness of the Department to citizens' concerns.
 - *Citizen input should be promoted, not limited*
- **Places politics above science-based resource management and the goals of Proposal G.** MUCC believes in reducing the level of political decisions in the management of Michigan's natural resources as much as possible. In 1996, nearly 70 percent of Michigan citizens supported this concept in favor of science-based management practices. Michigan citizens do not want natural resources management to be dictated by politics and the popular vote. Shifting the gubernatorial appointment of the Department Director from the NRC to the Governor will make the NRC and the Department's administration accountable to a political figure only. This injects more partisan politics into natural resources management by removing the buffer of the bipartisan NRC.
 - *Vesting a politically-motivated public official with complete authority over the new DNRE is the exact opposite direction we should be taking to create a service-based Department.*
 - *Environmental Science Review Board* – E.O. 45 also creates an Environmental Science Review Board, which should help bolster science-based management of Michigan's natural resources. However, E.O. 45 provides that this Board will be appointed by the Director, who would be held accountable only to the Governor. The concept of this Board is to equip the NRC and Director with unbiased scientific information for the purposes of making important management decisions (i.e., CWD). When a politically-appointed Director appoints the Board, its credibility as an unbiased consultant to the DNRE is severely undermined.

For the aforementioned reasons, we respectfully ask members of this joint committee to support SCR 24 with the goal of restoring the Natural Resources Commission's appointment authority in order to increase transparency and reduce politics in Michigan's natural resources management. Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns on this critical matter.

Respectfully submitted,



Dave Nyberg
MUCC Government & Public Relations Manager

Great Lakes Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers – James Schramm, President
Holland Fish and Game Club – Drew Deters, President
Michigan Bow Hunters Association – Bruce Levey, President
Michigan Charter Boat Association – Captain Denny Grinold, President
Michigan Duck Hunters Association – Drew Deters, President
Michigan Hunting Dog Federation – Matt Wood, President
Michigan Pheasants Forever – Mike Parker, Regional Biologist
Michigan River Guides Association – John Ray, President
Michigan Trappers and Predator Callers Association – John Caretti, President
Michigan Trout Unlimited – Dr. Bryan Burroughs, Executive Director
National Wildlife Federation – Andy Buchsbaum, Great Lakes Regional Executive Director
Saugatuck Area Charter Boat Association – Ron Westrate, President
Upper Peninsula Sportsmen's Alliance – Dale McNamee, President